'GOOD OLD DAYS' WERE NOT SO GOOD FOR ACTOR AND THEATER; MORAL FORCES OF COMMUNITY FROWNED UPON ENTERTAINMENTS

WHAT WOULD THOSE OLD-TIMERS THINK IN THESE GAY DAYS?

Playgoers, Actors—They Were Not "Artists" Then — Were Haled Before Hard-Boiled Judges and Given the Limit—Stringent Laws Prevented Theatrical Performances in America for Many Years.

By HARRY SHREVE.

IN these days of naughty musical comedies, daring costumes and problem sex-plays, it is hard to imagine that around two hundred and fifty years ago in America, the theater was considered an institution of the Devil, and the performers and persons daring to attend a performance were social outcasts. In those bygone times the actor and actress spent more than half their time in prison for giving innocent little plays disguised under the titles of lecturer and recitals and we can conclude that our present day theatrical favorites who are regaling the country with "Getting ertie's Garter," "The Demi-Virgin" and other naughty farces would have received a swift and heated finish from our staid forefathers.

In most of the Northern States there were drastic laws against either giving or attending a theatrical performance of any nature. In spite of these laws, performances were given from time to time and performers and spectators were haled before indignant judges and compelled to pay the penalty. Theaters were disguised under the names of lecture halls and lecture rooms, and great ingenuity was displayed in trying to fool the authorities by calling the shows educational recitals.

ACTED FOR JUDGE.

The first play we have any record of was produced in Williamsburg, Va., in 1665. It was called "Ye Bare and Ye Cub." The performers were arrested and required to repeat the performance, in full costume, before the judge in his chambers. The actors were released with a warning, which they evidently heeded, for no more performances were given. Fifty years later, or to be exact, in 1716, William Levingston brought a company of professional performers to Williamsburg. A contract is on record at Yorktown, Va., dated July 11, 1716, by which William Levingston agrees with Charles and Mary Stagg, actors, to build a theater in Williamsburg and to bring actors, scenery and music from England for the enacting of comedies and tragedies in said town. The theater was built in an alley, and upon his majesty's birthday in 1718, Alexander Spottwood and a brillian audience witnessed the opening performance.

It can be judged from this that any laws that may have been on the books against the theater had been repealed by this date. The Virginians were a pleasure-loving people, and it can be assumed that the theater was one of their favorite forms of recreation and doubtless a sort of a social headquarters in those days, as can be testified by the following advertisement, which appeared in the Gazette:

LIKED HIS TEETH.

"Whereas a gentleman, who, toward the latter half of the summer, usually wore a blue camlet coat lined with silver, a silver laced hat and a turpee wig, has often been observed by his amoret, and particularly one night at the theater, the said gentleman ogled her in such a manner as shewed him to be pretty far gone, the said amoret desires the gentleman to take the first handsome opportunity that offers to explain himself on the subject.

"N. B.—She believes that he has very pretty teeth."

In the North the theater was considered a highway to hell. It was fiercely condemned everywhere, and in many places drastic laws were passed, forbidding "showplays" under punishment. In 1750 the General Court of the State of Massachusetts passed a law forbidding the acting of plays under a heavy penalty. In 1761 Rhode Island passed an act to prevent "stage plays" and other entertainments within the colony, and the following year New Hampshire refused a troupe of actors admission to the town of Portsmouth on the grounds that plays had a peculiar influence upon the young and gravely endangered their morals by giving them as a taste of amusement and pleasure.

WITCHCRAFT JUDGE.

In 1714, Justice Sewall, who was one of the judges presiding in the famous witchcraft trials in Salem, wrote a letter of protest against the acting of a play in the council chamber at Boston. "Let not Christian Boston go beyond heathen Rome, in the practice of shameful vanities," he wrote. In 1750 a performance of "The Orphan" was given in a coffee house on State street in Boston. The occasion was such a novelty that the doors of the coffee house were beseiged by great crowds, long before the hour of the performance. People fought desperately to secure seats. A riot occurred and many persons were hurt. The affair caused such scandal that the authorities met at once and passed the following act:

"For preventing and avoiding the many and great mischiefs that arise from the giving of public stage plays, etc., which not only occasion great and unnecessary expense and tend to discourage industry and increase immorality and contempt of religion, be it enacted as follows:

"That from and after the publication of this act, no person or persons whatsoever may for his or their gain or for any price or valuable consideration, let or suffer to be used or improved, any house, room or place whatsoever for the acting or carrying on any stage plays, interludes or any other theatrical entertainment, on pain of forfeiting or paying for each and every day of time, such house, room or place shall be let used or improved, contrary to this act, twenty pounds; and if at any time whatsoever from and after the publication of this act, any person shall be present as an actor in or a spectator of any stage play, etc., in any house, etc., where a greater number of persons than twenty be assembled together, every such person shall forfeit for each time five pounds one-half to his majesty and one-half to the informer."

In January, 1792, the House of Representatives was petitioned to repeal this law. The petition was bitterly opposed by Samuel Adams, Benjamin Austin and other prominent men. In spite of this a number of well-known citizens formed an association for the promotion of the drama in Boston. Ground was purchased and a building errected in Broad alley, near Hawley street. It had a seating capacity of 500 and was called "The New Exhibition Room." On Thursday, August 16, 1792, the theater was opened with a vaudeville performance.

Entertainments were given for several weeks in open defiance of the law. The sheriff was on the job, however, and one night, during a performance of "The School for Scandal," he showed up and arrested every person he could lay his hands on. The performers were tried in Faneuil Hall, and public opinion was so favorable to them that they were released.

They reopened the theater, and were again arrested in December of the same year. On the occasion of the second appearance of the sheriff, the audience expressed their disapproval by starting a riot, in which a number of persons were injured. The authorities bowed to public opinion, and the law was repealed in 1793. The first theater to open within the law was the Federal Street Theater, on the night of February 4, with a prologue written by Thomas Paine, a son of Robert Treat Paine, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

NEW YORK'S VIEW.

In New York city the opposition to the theater was not quite so bitter. To be sure, the theater was looked down upon and no unco-guid citizen had any use for the theater or those who attended them. Newspapers refused to print their advertisements, and it was the habit of the performers to go from house to house presenting hand bills and telling the people of the merits of the plays they were appearing in.

The population of New York city in 1700 was 30,000, which included 7,000 slaves. There were weekly evening clubs and concerts, and it is only natural to suppose that there were many people who favored the theater, in spite of the general condemnation of them. Anthony Ashton, an English actor, showed up in New York and gave performances in 1702.

He wrote a play called "The Fool's Opera," which he prefaced with a quaint history of his life, which included a short account of his trip to America. It follows:

"My merry hearts, you are to know me as a gentleman, lawyer, poet, actor, soldier, sailor, exciseman and publican in England, Scotland, Ireland, New York, East and West Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, South Florida, Bahamas, Hispaniolo and often a coaster by all the same. After many vicissitudes, I arrived at Charles Towne, S. C., full of lice, shame, poverty and nakedness.

Anthony seems to have had a pretty hard time of it. He was soon broke and compelled to play on the sympathies of a kindly old sea captain in order to get back to England. After Ashton's departure there is no record of a theatrical performance for many years.

In 1732, George Farquhar's "The Recruiting Officer" was presented at the New Theater in New York city. This was the first theater in New York of which there is any record. The following advertisement, appearing in the New York Gazette of October 15, 1733, shows that the theater was still doing business at that date.

"ALSO A NEGRO GIRL."

"To be sold at reasonable rates, all sorts of Household Goods, viz., Beds, Chairs, Tables, Chest of Drawers, Looking Glasses, Andirons and Pictures, also several sorts of Drugs and Medicines, also a negro girl about sixteen years of age, has had the smallpox and is fit for town or country. Apply George Talbert, next door to the play-house."

Eighteen years later, Murray and Keen brought their company from Philadelphia. Brown, in his "History of the American Stage," describes the theater they appeared in as follows:

"It was a two-storied house, with high gables. The stage was raised five feet from the floor. The scenes, curtain and wings were all carried by the manager in his trunk. A green curtain was suspended from the ceiling. A pair of paper screens were erected upon the right and left hand sides of the stage for wings. Six wax lights were in front of the theater. The orchestra consisted of a German flute, horn and drum players. Suspended from the ceiling was a chandelier made of a barrel hoop, through which were driven a half dozen nails, into which were stuck so many candles. Two drop scenes representing a castle, a wood and bits of landscapes, river and mountain, comprised the scenery."

In 1824 President Dwight, of Yale College, declared that to indulge in a taste for play going meant nothing more or less than the loss of the immortal soul. Even as late as 1859, when Brooklyn had one theater and was about to build another, the opposition to the very name of theater was so bitter that the house was called the Academy of Music to avoid criticism. There were many heated arguments over the use of scenery in the new theater, and very strong opposition to the use of a curtain. Those opposed to the theater took the stand that the curtain was intended to conceal something, and concealment suggested impropriety.

MORE FOOL LAWS.

The ending of the war with England saw all sorts of foolish laws passed, and among them were many directed against the theater. Particularly in Philadelphia were the performers beset with new difficulties. A recommendation of Congress forbidding stage plays was adopted in 1778. For eleven years this law stood on the statute books, and until it was repealed in 1789, the performers had a hard time of it.

Theatrical managers resorted to all sorts of evasions to dodge the law. Some of them were successful, and others paid heavy fines and served out prison sentences.

In 1784 James Hallan and his company arrived in Philadelphia and presented a petition to the General Assembly praying that the law against stage plays be repealed. A counter petition, bearing the names of 198 prominent citizens, protesing against the repeal, balked Hallan. Nothing daunted, he and his company began to give a series of poetical addresses and lectures for the benefit of the relatives of those who had fallen in the war. On December 7 he opened the Southwark Theater and gave this class of entertainment until the 1st of August.

He then took his company to New York, where they presented the first play seen in that city after the war.

During the season of 1785-86 the practice of selling reserved seats was first instituted. Up to that date, no reserved seats had been sold. Tickets of good for admission only were dealt out at the box office, and theater-goers sent their servants to the theater as early as 6 o'clock in the evening to occupy seats until their mistresses and masters appeared. In 1787, Hallan and his company returned to Philadelphia, and, in spite of the law, opened up the Southwark Theater for a season of two weeks, the idea being to see just how far they could go. The first performance was given January 15, the entertainment being billed as a concert of music and lectures, to be concluded with a pantomime entitled "Robinson Crusoe."

THE "OPERA HOUSE."

The theater was rechristened the "Opera House," and the plays presented were disguised in many ways. A production of "Hamlet" was called "A Moral and Interesting Tale on the Life of the Prince of Denmark." "The School for Scandal" became a comic lecture in five parts, entitled "The Pernicious Vice of Scandal." "Improper Education" was the strange name given "She Stoops to Conquer." Another name for "Hamlet" was "Filial Piety." "Richard the Third" became the "Fall of Tyrany," while the "Rivals" came out under the name of the "Crime of Filial Ingratitude."

The folly of the situation soon made the law against the theater a joke, and a number of citizens placed their names on a petition asking for repeal of the law. This time the petition met with success, and on March 2, 1789, the Southwark Theater opened under its real name.

Testimonial benefits to the performers were all the rage in those days, and it was stipulated in many contracts held by the actors that they should receive at least one benefit during the season.

These benefits were widely advertised, and some of the public appeals put forth by the actors who were to be the beneficiaries were both pathetic and amusing. One actor advertising in the papers called upon the public to patronize his benefit in goodly numbers and gave as one of his reasons that he had just been released from prison and needed the money badly. An elderly actress made her appeal on the grounds that she was a lonely widow woman and had a very hard time to get along. Another actor based his claims for generous patronage on the fact that he was tired of the stage and wanted to get hold of enough money to open a barber shop.

It is to be wondered if those old timers who fought public opinion, the law, served time in jail and very often went with empty stomachs, ever thought there would come a day when thousand dollar a week salaries would be considered ordinary pay for playing a prominent part in a good theatrical production. Assailed by most good citizens, and looked upon as promoting vice and immorality, they certainly were a game old crowd, and if their shades ever linger around the theaters where some of the costumeless plays are presented in this generation, they must marvel as to how present day actors and actresses "get away with it."

WHAT WOULD 1776 THINK OF THIS?

And can you imagine the genial Al Jolson giving a "moral lecture" on "I Never Had No Mammy?"

THEATERS RESORTED TO CAMOUFLAGE FOR SAKE OF EXISTENCE

"Hamlet" and "The School for Scandal" Were Labeled "Moral Lectures," and Theaters as "Opera Houses" and "Exhibition Halls" in Strange Scheme of Protective Coloration Devised to Fit Conditions.

POLISH ART EXHIBITION OPENS AT ART CENTER ROOMS THIS AFTERNOON

(Continued from Page 5.)

There are photographs which show the "Lud-Pol" children and other employes of this progressive establishment.

There were many others, painters and sculptors, whom Flambeau met in Warsaw and elsewhere, who were most anxious to exhibit in Washington, and their contributions will doubtless arrive with the larger exposition next season.

From Vilna, in the north of Poland, a quaint old city, once the capital, and the seat of a remarkable university, reopened by the government since the war, there are a number of beautiful and important things, photographs, posters and Polish bread cards, designed by Prof. Ferdinand Ruszczyc, dean of the faculty of fine arts at Vilna University. One of these is the coat-of-arms of Poland in a large design in color. The "bread-cards" show portraits of Polish heroes, one ticket to be cut off each day for a loaf of bread.

An important archaeological study, "Polish Vilna," in English, by Prof. Juljusz Klos, who is professor of architecture in the university, describes the monuments and historic buildings of his city, of which there are also a number of photographs from a famous artist-photographer of Vilna, known throughout Poland.

It would, of course, be pleasant to review at some length the artists of Poland, famous the world over, like the Kossaks, father and son, the latter so recently a visitor in America. Or we might discuss the great Polish novelists, of whom Henryk Sienkiewicz, though perhaps not the greatest, is the best known to us for his "Quo Vadis." Again, one might sketch the lives of great women of Poland, of whom Mme. Curie is just now most conspicuous. She was born in Warsaw in 1867, the daughter of Prof. Sklodowski, of the University of Warsaw. One might follow her romantic career from her school-teaching day in Block and Warsaw to her graduation from the University of Paris with the degrees of doctors of physics in 1893, and of mathematics in 1894, her discovery of "polonium," named in honor of her native land, a chemical related to bismuth, and in the same year, 1898, her joint discovery with M. Curie of radium.

But today there is another cause for still deeper sympathy in America toward Poland. She is suffering from a tragedy, of which we have experienced a parallel, not once but twice in our history—the assassination of the President. No review of Polish arts, however brief, could fail to pay tribute to the late President Gabryel Narutowicz, elected December 9, and only one week in office, when, as the most distinguished patron of an art exhibit in Warsaw, he was basely shot by an assassin, doubtless mad, who called himself an artist.

President Narutowicz had won for himself an international reputation as a waterways engineer before he entered the Polish cabinet, where he became later on minister of foreign affairs. At the time he was invited by Prime Minister Grabski to become minister of public works, he was a professor in the Polytechnic Institute of Zurich.

Before he became foreign minister Mr. Narutowicz also served as minister of public works in the Witos and Ponikowski cabinets. In this capacity he was able to bring into play his technical knowledge and to further the development of waterways and water power. He became minister of foreign affairs in the Sliwinski cabinet early in July, and retained this position in the cabinet of Professor Nowak.

President Narutowicz was born in Samogitia. After graduating from the Technical Institute of Petrograd he continued his studies in other countries, particularly in Switzerland, where he made a specialty of hydraulic science. He was formerly chairman of the International Rhine Commission, which was charged with the task of developing and utilizing the water power of that river. As foreign minister he continued to carry out the Polish policy of friendly co-operation with other European states. When he represented Poland at the Baltic States' conference in Reval, Esthonia, not long ago, the foreign ministers of the four countries, Finland, Latvia, Poland and Esthonia, found themselves in perfect accord on all political questions of common interest to their states.

On October 24, Poland and Jugoslavia signed in Warsaw, a commercial treaty based on the most favored nation clause. With the completion of this agreement Poland now has commercial treaties with all three members of the Little Entente, as well as with France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria and the Free City of Memel. There are today in Poland many great men, of whom doubtless the best known to us is the great Socialist leader, Marshal Joseph Pilsudski.

SULTAN'S "WIDOWS" NOW FACE REALITY

CONSTANTINOPLE, Dec. 30.

THE Sultan Mohammed VI has fled from Constantinople, from Yildiz Kiosk, his marvelous oriental palace on the shores of the Bosphorus. There, in the high-walled and shuttered harem, where no sound from the outside world ever penetrates, he has left behind him his three wives, his female slaves and their attendants, 200 women, helpless and stupefied as sheep without a shepherd.

The deposed sultan had three wives—the first a woman of fifty, the second about thirty-two years old, at the height of her beauty; the third a child-bride of sixteen, to whom he is supposed to have been married, at the age of sixty-one, only two months ago.

A great blind wall, thirty feet high, encircles the palace of the sultan. Still another imprisons the harem buildings. The second one bounded the world of the women between them.

All the treasures of East and West were theirs without the necessity of making the slightest effort to obtain them. Silks and satins of incredible beauty, Parisian frocks and paradise plumed hats, native dresses, scarfs and shawls stiff with the incrustations of precious stones, little slippers of gold and silver brocade, adorably graceful and slim, clothed them. Gems sufficient to fill a jeweler's shop, rings, bracelets, necklaces by the score, adorned with enormous diamonds, emeralds, and rubies were showered upon them by their master.

They spent their lives reclining on soft cushions, with rugs and carpets of incredible antiquity and beauty spread beneath their feet, with slaves to obey their slightest whim, with sweetmeats and rich food to satisfy their appetites. They played together and quarreled together like children, intriguing, fighting, laughing—their task and their amusement to pass the time away.

There is a touch of pathos as well as absurdity in the story of one of their out-of-doors pastimes.

Through the park and gardens where they were forced to take the only exercise allowed them in their imprisonment there ran an artificial lake, perhaps half a mile in length. This for the wives, their female friends and relations, took the place of the Bosphorus, the glorious stretch of water that laps the shores of Constantinople, and whereon the pleasure boats take passengers for delightful excursion trips.

The little prisoners had their excursion trips, too, on the edges of the toy lake they caused landing stages to be built, which they named after the well-known Turkish pleasure resorts, Therapia and Beicos. On an absurd and hideous water-bicycle they would then set forth, half a dozen at a time, to explore the confines of their lake in a pathetic imitation of the excursionists of the great free world behind their invincible wall.

Slaves for a lifetime, predestined to lead the lives of children, toys strewn about an expensive playbox for the idle amusement of their master, the luxury of their simplest domestic utensils surpasses our imagination.

The life of one of the sultan's principal wives could indeed be described as a "bed of roses," though it is doubtful whether she would not scorn a couch of such inexpensive material as flower petals.

She lacked only the two things that make life worth living to the Western woman; freedom and real love.